

VZCZCXRO2399
PP RUEHBI RUEHCI
DE RUEHAM #6707/01 2421348
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 301348Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3672
INFO RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0108
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2571
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0114
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0091
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0207
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0113
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0201
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0022
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0024
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 4016
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0040
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0049
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006707

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO USTR LKARESH, AROSENBERG, JBUNTIN
STATE PASS TO DEPARTMENT OF LABOR JRUDE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [GTIP](#) [KTEX](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: UNANNOUNCED, PRIME MINISTER TOURS QIZ FACTORIES

REF: A. AMMAN 04167

[1](#)B. AMMAN 05595

[1](#)C. AMMAN 05566

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Prime Minister (PM) Ma'ruf al-Bakhit made unannounced visits on August 23 to four Qualifying Industrial Zone (QIZ) factories, including two "bad" factories chosen by the Ministry of Labor (MoL). According to an MoL contact, the PM was "surprised" by the working conditions, including low levels of sanitation and a high number of worker complaints in some of the factories. Press reports of the tours cited complaints about working hours and wages. The PM concluded the tours by affirming GoJ and MoL commitment to addressing worker complaints.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The PM's visits follow a mid-August visit by a USTR/DoL delegation (septel) to Jordan in which the PM and other ministers demonstrated strong commitment to addressing QIZ labor violations. While the PM's public attention to the QIZ problem is important in demonstrating high-ranking political attention to the problem, more progress on the public prosecution of labor violators remains a challenging shortfall that the GoJ needs to address promptly. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (U) According to MoL contacts, on the morning of August 23, the PM's office requested that the Ministry of Labor arrange unannounced visits to factories in the QIZs. The MoL's Advisor on QIZs arranged for visits to four factories: two "good" and two "bad" in the Al-Hassan Industrial Estate in the Irbid governorate. Accompanied by the Minister of Labor, the MoL Advisor on QIZs, and translators, the PM spent the entire day visiting the four factories.

[1](#)4. (SBU) According to the MoL contact who accompanied the PM, in many instances the PM was "surprised" by the working conditions (high temperatures at workstations, lack of sanitation) in the factories. While some workers were afraid to talk to the PM, a number did offer complaints focusing on bad working conditions, poor food, and filthy bathrooms. In one factory, the PM asked a number of foreign workers to sit with him separately and discuss issues. NOTE: Jordan's QIZ

factories employ approximately 38,000 foreign workers (60% of the total QIZ work force mostly from Bangladesh, China, and India. END NOTE. Additionally, the PM took the time to see the poor conditions of some bathrooms. The MoL contact said one factory manager was caught trying to coach his workers on what to say while the PM was there. The PM's guards overheard the coaching and informed the PM.

15. (SBU) On August 24, Minister of Labor Bassem Salem told the Ambassador, the visit was a "deliberative effort to signal high-level interest in labor conditions."

16. (U) Under the August 27 headline, "Government will not tolerate violations of workers' rights - PM," the Jordan Times reported that the visit was intended to reflect the government's concern "to follow up on the issues of foreign and domestic workers." The PM and Minister of Labor spoke to foreign workers from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and China and "listened to their concerns," reported the Times. Additionally, the PM was briefed by the Minister of Labor on the short-term inspection program to be carried out by USAID in the next three months. At the conclusion of the tours, the PM said to the accompanying press, "The government will not tolerate violations of workers' rights in the QIZs or any other workplace. The government will always work to ensure a decent and safe working environment in the QIZs."

17. (SBU) While happy with the publicity generated by the visits, our MoL contact stressed the need for the Ministry of Interior to take a stronger role in prosecution and arrest. The contact reiterated that the Ministry of Labor is unable to stop some of the trafficking, involuntary servitude, and

AMMAN 00006707 002 OF 002

other labor violations being uncovered, citing the Ministry of Interior as the lead in criminal prosecutions. As an additional hindrance, our contact cites inconsistent commitment to fixing the problem at the working levels in the MoL. The MoL contact said the PM and Minister asked for a report of the day's visit, but was not aware of any new action plan or next steps request as an outcome of the highly-publicized visit.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Embassy will continue to follow closely the range of issues involving foreign labor and the QIZs. The Embassy will also seek the Ministry of Interior's views of next steps in criminal prosecutions of violators.
HALE